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## Population Aging in India: Its Socio - Economic Implications with reference to Northeast India

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### ABSTRACT

*India's demographic trends suggest that there has been steep rise in the growth of the elderly population in the past few decades. Reduction in the infertility and mortality rates owing to advances in medical science and greater accessibility to better public health services both in the rural and urban sectors has led to the growth of the aging population in India including the Northeast. The demographic phenomena called 'population aging' has far reaching socio economic implications for the elderly in particular, and the society at large, the elderly people are becoming increasingly vulnerable to emotional, physical and financial insecurity. Financial insecurity is the most serious issue among the aging population. In this regard, the policy makers and administrators both at the state and the central level in particular, and the NGO's and civil society at large need to formulate welfare policies to safeguard the economic security of the elderly people in the country. In the traditional Indian society the concept of joint family has been instrumental in providing emotional and physical security to aging population in the country. However, in the present day scenario the emergence of nuclear family set-ups has unfortunately exposed the aging population to social insecurity. In this context the families and relatives of the elderly people can help to form a base support for the social security of their elders.*

**Keywords:** Financial insecurity, Social insecurity, Family structure, Welfare Policies.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To focus on the socio-economic implications of aging in Northeast India in particular, and in India at large
- To highlight the need of a strong social security system in India in the wake of changing demographics

**METHODOLOGY**

Empirical data are obtained through conversation, personal contact, personal knowledge, observation and participation with some old age people. Besides secondary data are collected from e-resources, encyclopedia and books.

**RESEARCH ANALYSIS**

The paper primarily focuses on the socio - economic implications of aging in India with special reference to north eastern part of the nation. The paper also attempts to lay an emphasis on the need for effective measures to provide the elderly with social and economic security. Keeping with the global trend, life expectancy has been rising over the years. India’s aging population is growing at an alarming rate. In 2011 India’s elderly population was estimated at 10 crores, and 2030 it is projected to reach 20 crores. The proportion of elderly person in the total population is expected to increase 8.3% in 2011 to 12.4% in 2026.

Growth of elderly population age 60 years and above in India from 1951-2001:

Year	Population (60 years+ in millions)
1951	19.61
1961	24.72
1971	32.70
1981	43.98
1991	55.30
2001	75.93

**Source:** Sharma, S.P & Peter Xenos. ‘Aging in India; Demographic Background and Analysis Based on Census Materials’ Occasional Paper No.2 of 1992, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, New Delhi, 1992 (4).

The above table suggests that there has been a rapid growth in the elderly population in India post independence. The steep rise in the growth of the elderly population has been due to reduction in the mortality and infertility rates owing to advances in medical science and public health care services. The demographic phenomenon called 'Population Aging' has far reaching socio-economic implications for the elderly in particular, and the society at large. The elderly are becoming increasingly vulnerable to emotional, physical and financial insecurity.

Financial insecurity is the most serious issue affecting the elderly people in India. The majority of elderly workers are illiterate engaged either as agricultural workers in the rural areas or as unskilled or semiskilled workers in the urban areas. These unorganized sectors which accounts for 84% - 94% of elderly workers do not provide social insurance schemes and thus require economic support from their relatives or the government. Only about 10% - 16% of the elderly worked in the organized sectors. According to NSSO, only 10% - 16% of the elderly are employed in the organized sectors, including government and public sector institutions. The Government of India has introduced several national policies for the elderly like:

- i) Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP), 1992
- ii) National Policy on Older Person (NPOP)
- iii) The National Policy for Senior Citizens
- iv) The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007
- v) New National Pension Scheme

However, these policies cover mainly those who have retired from the organized sectors including government and public sector employees. But then policies do not cover the majority (nearly 84%) of the aging population who are engaged in unorganized sector which is a major cause of concern for all of us.

The family is the key institution which has been providing social security to the elderly people. The traditional Indian society laid stress on giving love and respect and providing care for the elder members. Thus, the elder members of the family were taken care of in the family itself. With the advent of modernization the traditional values in our society have eroded to a great extent leading to defiance and decline of respect for elders among the young generation. Even in the rural areas, where the majority of India's aging population live and where the process of modernization has been slow, the concept of nuclear family set-ups is first emerging which has further added to the problem of social insecurity among the old age people. Fortunately in Northeast India the concept of joint family still prevails in large parts of the region especially in rural Assam which provides a secured living environment for the elderly people.

## OBSERVATIONS

Keeping with the national trend, since 1950 there has been a sharp decline in the mortality rates and a steady decline in infertility rate in northeast India. Consequently, there has been a substantial growth in the aging population in North eastern part of the country. The percentage of illiteracy among the elderly in North east India, i.e. 60years + age group is higher than that of the general population. Also illiteracy is more prevalent among elderly female than elderly male especially in the rural sector.

Majority of the elderly people in the north east region both in the rural and urban sectors are economically active firstly because, they are engaged in the unorganised sectors where there is no specific age of retirement. Along with that they are not covered by social insurance scheme like the pension scheme available to those working in the organised sector.

As in other parts of the country in the North east too very few welfare programmes have been initiated either by the state governments or the central government to provide adequate financial security to the aging population. There are very few welfare programmes initiated by the government for the elderly people engaged in the unorganised sector. And the schemes that are there are inadequate. For instance, the old age pension scheme introduced by the state governments provides only small payments. Moreover it covers only a fraction of the elderly people.

Social isolation is associated with old age. However, in Northeast India a positive factor which has been providing social security to a majority of the elders especially in the rural sectors is the strong attachment of the family members to the elderly. The joint family system still exists in most of rural Assam which has helped to take care of the aged.

Most of the elderly people are without income so they need support either from their family members or from the government. In order to ensure that the elderly people live a secured and dignified life the governments both at the state and the central level need to take measures for the social and financial security of the elderly. The government could consider social insurance schemes to cover elderly people especially those working in the unorganised sectors. In this context the government in particular and the NGO's and civil society at large need to take measures for productive employment of the old age people before the problem of financial insecurity grows to an unmanageable proportion. In order to provide social security to the elderly we need to promote our traditional values so that we treat our elders with love and compassion. The government can also do its bit by setting up old age homes and rehabilitation centres on a large scale basis to provide social security to those elderly who are abandoned by their families and relatives.

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